

RUSSIAN AGGRESSION ON UKRAINE AND ZAGREB SECURITY FORUM

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We noticed numerous, very demanding security challenges that modern societies and countries were faced with, we launched the Zagreb Security Forum (ZSF). One of its key goals is to create conditions and assumptions so that security challenges coming from the spectrum of hybrid threats to the security and stability of societies, individual states and international organizations can be identified early enough. One of the key topics that we thoroughly dealt with every year is explanation of the hybrid threats that the Russian Federation uses in the process of imposing its own goals and will against other societies and states. These threats are not directed only against individual countries, but also against alliances and organizations such as NATO and the EU. The existence of an aggressive policy of the Russian Federation towards Georgia, the Baltic states, Finland, and Ukraine was especially pointed out at ZSF.

After launching a brutal and unprovoked aggression against the sovereign state of Ukraine, President Putin managed to unite not only EU member states but also NATO alliances.

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Both had a significant number of internal issues on which the decision-making process was a demanding challenge. Now it is completely different. It has been realized within NATO and EU that the line between war and peace, high and low intensity conflicts is very thin and subject to the decisions and influence of people who sometimes make decisions that are not rational. The intensity and scope of sanctions, their deepness, practically tectonic negative consequences for Russian society and economy, and thus for the state, will be extremely strong. And in a very short time. According to the first available information, it is difficult to expect that Russia, which was left almost alone on the world political and economic scene, will be able to withstand the burden of these sanctions without serious social (de)stabilization processes.

Decision-making process of strategic importance, and the decision to start a war is a strategic decision, must be based on accurate and timely intelligence obtained from credible, relevant, and reliable sources. Putting in the context of the real relations, possibilities and abilities of Russia and Ukraine, as well as the mood and messages that came from the international community, it was certain that Russia could only lose by starting the aggression against Ukraine. From everything that is visible so far, the following can be determined:

1. Russia has not developed its military capabilities (human resources, offensive, psychological, logistical, intelligence and security, political, economic, financial, energy) aimed to attack the territory of Ukraine that could guarantee the success of a *blitzkrieg*;
2. Russia did not, mentally, and psychologically, prepared its army for offensive action against the Ukraine, a sovereign state.
3. The Armed Forces of Ukraine are not in the state they were in 2014. In the meantime, they have become

more numerous, better equipped, more coordinated, more capable, mentally, and psychologically much more capable and, most importantly, strongly reidentified with their own national identity.

4. Ukraine has strong and almost unreserved international support unlike Russia which has been left almost alone on the world political, economic, security, cultural, sports, financial and every other scene.
5. Russia has lost the information war. Although Russia seems to be winning on the battlefield, the overall victory will go to Ukraine, while only the end of the war will show and lead Ukraine as the complete winner. With limitation that Ukraine rationalizes its information activities towards societies and countries that are providing intensive help to Ukraine.

Therefore, launching aggression against Ukraine was anything except rational move to achieve Russia's strategic goals: a change of government in Ukraine, the installation of pro-Russian politicians, Ukraine's integration into the Russian bloc, which now includes Belarus, and occasionally Serbia.

The issue of miscalculations by the intelligence services is clearly visible because the war did not meet the set goals, within the expected 24 hours. Although we have no insight into these documents, from the development of relations on the ground and Russian operations on the first and following days, it is obvious that Russian intelligence estimates were almost completely wrong not only in relation to the mood of the population towards "liberators from Russia" but also that the Russians will soon reach the center, and with the help of the local population and pro-Russian politicians to meet their strategic goals.

A special problem for Russia will be the possibility that, after the war once, and we hope it will be soon, the reconstruction

and construction of Ukraine and the payment of war damages for crimes and destruction by members of the Russian and pro-Russian armed forces will be collected from the Russian financial assets that West froze. It will certainly be one of the crucial issues around which "spears can be broken" during the negotiation process.

Unfortunately, Russia is also threatening with a nuclear attack. Such a possibility can never and must not be ruled out. Nuclear weapons are a means by which one who possesses them tries to deter a potential attacker. All those who have nuclear weapons know that they will not be spared in a nuclear war. The fact, although it may seem strange now, after the crash of an unmanned aircraft in Zagreb few days ago, above Europe exist a very effective anti-ballistic shield (more about it is available on this website: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49635.htm).

In the area of the six Western Balkan countries, there are several destabilizing factors that are influenced by Russian and pro-Russian instruments by which they try to project their own interests. Recognition of these instruments of power, "euthanasia" of their destructive potential and the spread of the crisis in this area, is one of the most important issues addressed by the ZSF, and by the intelligence agencies and institutions of EU member states and NATO. It should also be emphasized that there are circles, especially in B&H, which, by indirectly encouraging Serbian radicalism, are still trying to dominate on the political scene of B&H to create fertile ground for projection and realization of their own interests. That is basically against the interests of B&H.

Russia is the aggressor, and, in that aggression, they committed numerous crimes and war crimes against the civilian population in Ukraine. Ukraine is defending itself and already gained better negotiating positions. The longer the war lasts, the more financial, economic, human, social, political and security problems Russia will have. It will

continue to be isolated from the world (North Korea, Belarus, Syria, Venezuela, and parts of Serbia that continue to support the Russian Federation are not serious partners). Ukraine's neutrality, which will be guaranteed by the NATO alliance, can and should be one of the solutions that will be achieved at the "green table". With the Russian withdrawals from the areas that were temporarily occupied during this aggression.

A week before the Russian aggression in Ukraine started, we received two articles from our colleagues from Ukraine for a review. Their content is extremely current, accurate, precise, and reliable in the context of the analysis of possible scenarios of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Given the beginning of the aggression and given that the process of double-blind review was completed, but due to the impossibility of correcting these articles (not in content but in form), the editors decided to publish both articles in this issue, which fully enlightens Ukraine's defense against Russian aggression.

We hope that the Russian aggression will be stopped soon, that diplomacy, public and secret ones, will take precedence in resolving challenges and disputes, and that Ukraine will fully restore its territorial, state-building independence and sovereignty in full.